

WITH BRONSON HOWARD.

HE SAYS THE DRAMATIST OF THE FUTURE WILL BE A MECHANIC.

The Evolution of a Play—He Does Much of His Work in Bed and Acknowledges Obligation to Tobacco Smoke.

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Bronson Howard, when not at his literary labors, is on the wing all the time. He is a wanderer on the face of the earth. He has been to many lands, from Alaska to Mexico, and from Honolulu to Russia. It is in consequence of this nomadic life that it is impossible to tell a connected narrative of the home existence of the dramatist. His home is wherever he beats a human heart. His it is to appreciate, understand, and recognize the impulses of men and women, the world over, then to set down his studies in imperishable plays.

I think you would like Bronson Howard. If you could but meet him. In this, though, the chances are against you. You stroll over to the Lotos club and ask him to address; they respond that "Mr. Howard is out West somewhere." You drop in on a snug home. "Why, isn't Mr. Howard in London?" suggests an astonished friend at the depot, as you return to town disappointed. "I understood that he was in London, you know."

In the face of this I think I would be justified in saying boldly, after the fashion of the bell boy, who took up my card—



MR. HOWARD INTERVIEWED.

"Mr. Howard is in bed, but he says come right up just the same. With many misgivings, I slowly mounted the red velvet-carpeted stairs, considering a dozen and one excuses for the impropriety of meeting a man in bed. Faintly I knocked at his door. I almost wished that the tap would not be heard."

"Come in!" cried a lusty voice.

As I entered the door my glance fell upon the familiar face of the dramatist, his head just raised from the pillows, his arm extended, opening the door. He was in bed!

"Come right in! You know I am an old newspaper man myself, and am ever ready to meet my friends without standing on ceremony."

Bronson Howard seeks information everywhere. He asks fully as many questions as he answers. He was greatly interested in the outlook for newspaper workers in New York, since the recent panic.

And I could well see why. It is twenty-five years since Mr. Howard was connected with the press. But the associations are especially dear to him, because it was here he obtained his start as a writer.

Mr. Julius Chambers, who has a name as great in his own line as has Bronson Howard, recently told the following story: "Howard is sitting up in bed, and he has been in the office long before the boys discovered his ambition to be a playwright. He used to read up selections from his plays, and then ask our opinions. I was too busy to notice any merit in them. Besides, what newspaper man is interested in a play, a novel, or a history; or what press writer but thinks that he will strike fame and fortune as soon as that extra writing is finished?"

"Well, I forgot all about Howard and his plays, until one night when I went to see 'Saragotta,' there were cries of 'author! author!' Fancy my perplexity, amaze, and delight, when they stopped before the foot-lights, my old journalistic running-mate, Bronson Howard!"

And so, as I said, Howard was lying in bed! There was a box of cigars on the bureau, which suggested to me what Mr. Howard calls "the smoking stage" of his work.

"You are working on a play now, are you not?"

"The dramatist rolled uneasily in his bed, yawning softly behind his brown, strong hand and replied:

"Yes, I am at work on a play; I have been engaged in the effort for some time past. It is too early yet to say just what sort of a play it shall be. How so? Well, I leave direct mention of the character of the piece to the managers. This is an inviolable rule with me."

"What is the first process in evolving one of your plays?"

"It is what I call the 'smoking stage.' When I decide to write a drama, I go about it in a methodical manner. For weeks, yes, months, I smoke and make notes. What the notes consist of I shall show you later. I spent the summer in Jackson, Michigan, where I went to over-

see my wards, more by my presence than otherwise. I had a den fitted up in one of the public office buildings, where I went each day to smoke and reflect on certain social conditions in which I am deeply interested; they are, in some sort, yet determined, to become part of the unwritten play. After work-hours I usually took a spin on my bicycle."

"Then you 'smoke'?"

"Oh, yes," responded Howard, earnestly, shifting his position in bed. "I like the wheel, and have spent many happy hours thereon. I do not carry the exercise to any undue length, though. It was at Honolulu that I first learned to ride. The 'black and blue business' came there."

"Black and blue business; what's that?"

"I perceive you are no wheelman; why, I mean the bruises, headers, falls and so on. I found that there is much to learn before one masters the safety, but I finally attained such skill that I could ride from times around the mile race-

track at Jackson without tiring myself in the least."

"Where are all your 'best dramatists,' Mr. Howard?"

"Where are they? Well, I will ask you, where are they? I hear a great deal about lost dramatists. Now, these men are right down in front, so to speak; they have, we will assume, the literary training necessary for the dramatic art, or at least something nearly allied thereto, akin to it. But they produce no play! They produce no plays!"

As Mr. Howard said this I could see by the steady light that shined in his deep-set, grey eyes that he was touched by the inspiration of a theme near and dear to his heart. There is something almost fierce about Bronson Howard's discourse at close range. It is difficult to warm him, but once his enthusiasm is awakened, he betrays long association with the stage and the drama by the dramatic fervor with which he addresses himself to his subject. Then it is that his voice rings in clear round qualities; his eyes snap, the lines of his face start and move in expressive mold, while, occasionally, one of his hands will be stirred in nervous gesture. You cannot escape the feeling that he at times sets his jaws with the sternness of a soldier, and then it is that you catch a fleeting glimpse of the indomitable will, the unvarying, tireless persistence of this man, who has contented to wait some fifteen years for recognition long deferred. Filled with his subject, Bronson Howard, at this moment, risks partly in his bed, draws nearer to me, until he fairly glows in my face, while talking in slow, almost labored sentences, thus:

"I will tell you there are no lost dramatists! The fact that a man can write a novel or a fine short story, as I take it, the very reason why he cannot produce a play. In all English literature—and I have closely studied this theme—there is only one instance of a novelist of national reputation, who ever produced even an enduring play of so high a rank as the fourth class! That man is Bulwer Lytton. Now then, if the geniuses in novelistic endeavor have produced nothing in several hundred years gone by, what conclusion is to be drawn?"

He paused and regarded me with an earnestness that was almost fierce, then proceeded:

"Now then, I will tell you where all the so-called lost dramatists have gone. A year ago as a member of the Dramatic club, in Detroit, the conversation turned on this very theme. On that occasion I had, among my auditors, an engineer by name Mr. Howard. That man, who by the way, had literary abilities, plied me with questions, listened intently to my responses, and, in a word, manifested an interest in the topic, an intelligent understanding thereof, mind to mind, man to man, such as I have never yet in all my life-long association with purely literary men, experienced! That was the breaking of a new light in my thought. Do you know what it is?"

"No," he said, "I am in bed now, deeply engrossed with his presentation of what, to me, was to be an idea in the nature of a revelation. The bed clothes were askew; the large gold watch, which had heretofore been a pillow, in some mysterious fashion now lay directly in front of me, directly in the spot where, I am sure, when the dramatist makes one of his characteristic gestures with his right hand, the blow will smash it into a thousand pieces!"

"All our lost dramatists—their glaring failure—are to be found—their bending nearer and nearer—in the ranks of our architects—and engineers!"

The gesture stopped itself, mid-way, and the watch was saved; but the dramatist continues, still in his intense fashion.

"Yes, sir; show me a man who has constructive ability of a high order, who has two or three buildings, machinery, mechanical appliances of all sorts, and I will show you one who, through force of circumstances—provided always that he have the literary instinct—has slipped from the ranks of dramatists, where he rightly belongs, and has entered the field of applied forces. I do not believe that a literary man can write plays unless he have the mechanical skill. What do you

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very qualities which he had credited to Thackeray."

"Turning the subject abruptly, Mr. Howard laughingly waved his hand in the direction of his bureau.

"Look there," he said, "do you know what that means?"

"No one to pick up!"

The dramatist positively enjoyed my remark when I said, boldly:

"Then you are not neat, Mr. Howard."

"Why? Well, I am the most untidy, unmethodical, heedless, forgetful man alive! Why, by Jove, I am so forgetful that I have to hold the door when I go out for the night, so I will not miss so doing when I return! Look at that bureau! Look at this room! Things thrown around every which-way! No one to pick up! That's what I say. For years it has been so. Wait till I show you how I keep track of my notes, books, and accounts! But, before so doing, I must ask you to excuse me, while I arise and make my toilet. Over in the corner

hling in the world. Let me tell you why. I have been gambling in Monte Carlo. But Wall street is a thousand times deadlier than Monte Carlo. For this reason: In Monte Carlo a man bets a franc, ten francs, a thousand francs, in a twinkling he knows the result. But in Wall street the excitement is prolonged for months! For illustration, a man makes a bet that the price of wheat next May will be a dollar a bushel. During all these months the operator's nerves are on edge. If a fortune is in the balance, and the market is going the wrong way, the man will work himself up to a fever heat, as the fatal day approaches. He may even go finally stark mad! Like Daniel Drew, as told in that clever book, 'On a Margin,' he may present the pitiful spectacle of a once powerful factor in the financial world, ruined in a night, gazing along the streets for only a million."

"Then, there is the other school of speculators, who gamble with other people's money. They are always cool. My character of 'Adamant Flint' is an illustration of that class. All this, as I started out to tell you, grew out of a suggestion I received from a broken-down man—with a green patch over his eye."

After Mr. Howard had decided on the theme he makes out, as it is explained to me, two lists comprising men, the other women; then these lists are supplemented by names, the cognomens being selected with reference to the characteristics of the men and women. But this is only in the notes. The cast of names is completely altered, so that there will be no suggestion of the personality of the character by his or her name. Mr. Howard's second task in play-building then would be represented by a list like this:

A sharp financier.
A good lawyer.
A rascally doctor.
A pompous merchant.
A rich uncle.
A poor inventor.

A society girl.
A good mother.
A bad mother.
A pert schoolteacher.
A country maiden.
A washerwoman.

These characters would be named in a way to help keep in mind their peculiarities, as follows: The sharp financier would be Mr. Skins, the rascally doctor would be 'Mr. Skin 'em Quick,' the pompous merchant, 'Mr. Skin 'em Quick,' the rich uncle, 'Mr. Wealthy Lands,' the poor inventor, 'Mr. Skin 'em Quick,' the society girl, 'Mr. Skin 'em Quick,' the good mother, 'Mr. Skin 'em Quick,' the bad mother, 'Mr. Skin 'em Quick,' the pert schoolteacher, 'Mr. Skin 'em Quick,' the country maiden, 'Mr. Skin 'em Quick,' the washerwoman, 'Mr. Skin 'em Quick.'

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